

Mehana Blaich
December 11, 1999

RECONCILIATION TESTIMONY

Ano ai me ke aloha no kakou apau. O Mehana Blaich ko'u inoa. No Kalihiwai Kaua'i mai au. My name is Mehana Blaich and I testify today on the behalf of my 'ohana, Ka'opua, Bailey, Loomis and Blaich 'ohana from Hawi, Kalihi, and my home, Kalihiwai on the island of Kaua'i.

First I would like to say mahalo to everyone who has shared their mana'o here today, whether on the microphone, or in conversations outside of this hall. I am only an opi'o, youth, and I have learned so much from listening to everyone here today. Mahalo also to Mr. Van Norman and Mr. Berry for filling what we know must be a very difficult job, to bear the brunt of years of emotion and injustice, and to listen with open minds and hearts and try to do what is right. Mr. Van Norman, you said this morning that your wife, who is carrying your first baby, is ill today. All of our prayers and aloha are with her and your 'ohana. I also would like to ask you where you are from, where do you call home, because, as a Hawaiian, defined by this 'aina that is my home, it is also important that I know and honor the 'aina that is your home.

Many speakers before me have eloquently expressed that what we truly want is independence, total independence from the United States. I believe that will be best, not just for na kanaka maoli, but for all of the people of Hawai'i nei, everyone who loves and calls Hawai'i home, regardless of race. Because, we are an island nation, we cannot be governed by the laws of a continent. We have limited resources, limited land, limited fresh water, and laws of continents do not plan for those limits, therefore, under these laws, we will lose all that is unique and beloved about our 'aina, our home. However, Mr. Berry, and Mr. Van Norman, you have expressed that you will carry that clear message back to Washington and we thank you for that, as we know that is all you can do given your mandate today. With that understanding, that our eventual goal is independence, I would like to offer seven other concrete things you can do to help our people.

1) Grant our people **federal recognition** as indigenous people of the United States.

2) Establish a **Native Hawaiian Land Trust**.

3) The next two measures are necessary to enable us to care for and protect the 'aina which is not included in the land trust, 'aina which is quickly being overrun and denuded. First, Hawai'i needs to be exempt from the American right to move wherever you want, whenever you want. The US constitution guarantees unlimited migration between states. However, Hawai'i is your only island "state."

Our population is growing quickly, not because of births, but from in-migration. People on the mainland see the images we project of Hawai'i and think it would be a great place to move to and we have no control over that, yet our islands cannot sustain the population. **We need a constitutional amendment to limit in-migration to Hawai'i from the rest of the U.S.**

4) We need to be able to regulate who buys and sells land which is outside of the Native Hawaiian Land Trust. Anini beach, near where I grew up, is an example of this need. Most of the local families, the Hawaiian families, who've lived at Anini for generations, who lived there when I was a child, have moved off the beach in the last ten years, driven off by real estate speculation pushing their property taxes higher and higher. Their homes have been replaced by concrete, stucco, glass, tile mansions with huge walls that look like they belong in Beverly Hills, that line the beach and block access. These homes, one of which belongs to Sylvester Stallone, sit empty most of the year because they are merely vacation spots for their owners. In the United States of America, fame and money can buy you just about anything. We cannot allow it to buy our 'aina. **We need the power to impose regulations on real estate sales;** to insist that you cannot buy land in our community unless you want to make it your home, that you cannot buy it solely for speculation and sell it again in a year, that you cannot build a home in Hawai'i unless it looks like it belongs here, and that you cannot block off access to the beach with walls.

5) **We also need stewardship rights, even on non-Hawaiian owned lands.** Hawaiian families which have lived in a certain ahupua'a since time immemorial, must have konohiki rights, to manage resources in their home areas. Again, at Anini, the once alive reef, the best for snorkeling in our area, is silted out because, as all these homes were built, no one enforced rules to ensure their dirt and silt didn't run into the streams and out to cover the reef. The kahelelani shells so plentiful when I was a child are disappearing because no one regulates how much people take. Right now, regulating these things is the responsibility of the state, but they are not fulfilling the responsibility. **We need to allow Hawaiian families to enforce regulations to malama the 'aina and resources in their home.**

6) **I also suggest that you route federal money targeted for Native Hawaiians, not through state agencies, but through either the Native Hawaiian trusts, or through the federal agency you are suggesting establishing to attend to Hawaiian concerns.** For example, I am director of a federal grant awarded under the Native Hawaiian Education Act to Ke Kula Kaiapuni o Anuenue, Hawaiian language immersion school. The grant funding, which was supposed to commence on August 1, 1999, has yet to come through to our school. Because the money is awarded first to the state and the state department of education, we are waiting for it to travel through the state bureaucracy, getting approval from every office from the governor to the DOE superintendent to the budget office. Once the money does come through, we can only purchase goods and services from vendors on the state DOE payroll and list of approved vendors. This means that, even if cement is 50%

cheaper at another store, I have to buy it from the state's contracted provider. I cannot use that money to support Hawaiian businesses, even if they have the best price and quality. **Channeling federal funds to Hawaiians through Hawai'i state agencies cheats both the federal government and the Hawaiians who are supposed to be benefiting.**

7) Finally, I ask for **reauthorization of both the Native Hawaiian Health and Education Acts**. I am a beneficiary of the Native Hawaiian Education Act through a scholarship through the Native Hawaiian Higher Education Program, which enabled me to graduate from Harvard University in 1997. I tell you this to let you know that federal funding to Hawaiians does make a difference, that every dollar you spend on one person, we will try to put to work to make a difference for all of our people. I thank you for the opportunity you have afforded me. I look forward to creating opportunities for other young Hawaiians in my chosen field of education. Mahalo a nui loa.

*Mahalo,
Mehna Blaich*

I would like
to submit this also
for the record.

This testimony
supports the
necessity of continuing
to fund Hawaiian
Education programs
through the N.H.E.A. Mahalo

Mehana Blaich
Kaua'i Hearing
11/30/99

**NATIVE HAWAIIAN EDUCATION ACT
REAUTHORIZATION HEARING TESTIMONY**

Aloha mai kakou and mahalo for the opportunity to present testimony here today. My name is Mehana Blaich and I come from Kalihiwai, Kaua'i.

Due to a generous scholarship from the Native Hawaiian Higher Education ^{Program,} I was able to attend Harvard University and graduated in 1997. My years at Harvard gave me the opportunity to study sociology and education in an exciting, stimulating environment with amazing professors and students from all over the world. From the beginning, I was conscious that very few students from Hawaii, and even fewer Native Hawaiian students, would have this opportunity and I worked hard to learn as much as I could to bring home, to give back, some of what I had been given.

The Native Hawaiian Higher Education Program not only believes that scholarship recipients should come home and give back, they mandate it. Every summer they required me to perform service to the Hawaiian community. One summer I worked at the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, learning about efforts to support Hawaiian education from the government level. One summer, I came home to Kaua'i to work with Hawaiian Farmers of Hanalei, a group of Hawaiian families I had grown up with, who were farming kalo and producing poi in the ahupua'a of Waipa.

I had never made poi or planted kalo, the staple crop and spiritual older brother of our people, and in that summer, working with the kupuna at Waipa, I learned how much I had to learn, about working with my hands, about caring for our 'aina, about keeping practices and stories alive, about speaking my mother tongue, about listening. I ran a camp for eight Hawaiian youth from O'ahu, urban kids who were classified as "at-risk," and nearly failing school. I learned how meaningful and engaging education could be for them in this outdoors environment as they lit up with new found interest in chemistry "How come the kalo makes your throat itch if you don't cook it long enough?", physics, "Why does the water flow faster in this lo'i than in that one?", biology, "How do these pink egg sacs grow into the snails that eat the taro?", and geology "How did this valley get here and why is it shaped this way?"

The next summer I looked for a school, not just a summer or extracurricular program, but an actual school, which was teaching Hawaiian students rigorous academic subjects, through this different model of education; community based, hands-on, outdoors, intent on preserving our culture. The program I found was Wai'anae High School, Hawaiian Studies Program, also supported by a grant from the Native Hawaiian Education Act to Ka'ala Farm. Ka'ala Farm is the cultural learning center where students study archaeology, native plants, reforestation, water quality management, stream testing, and the ahupua'a system. I was so impressed by this program and the students' passion for what they were learning; their determination to find jobs in environmental science and other fields that would enable them to learn and teach more about Hawaiian ways to care for our 'aina, that I decided to make it the subject of my senior thesis at Harvard. By the time I was finished, my professors too were impressed with the program, and the possibilities it offered to improve education for other students who struggle in the mainstream school system, not just in Hawai'i, but throughout our country.

By exposing me to the exciting and progressive work of various Hawaiian educational organizations, much of it made possible by this act, The Native Hawaiian Education Program, helped me to learn the kind of work I want to do. By providing me with scholarship assistance and hugely reduced loan debt, freeing me from needing a high salary job, the Native Hawaiian Education Program, enabled me to actually do this work.

Currently, I work as coordinator of another program funded through the Curriculum Development, Teacher Training, and Recruitment program of the Native Hawaiian Education Act. I am working at Ke Kula Kaiapuni 'o Anuenue, Anuenue Hawaiian Language Immersion School in Palolo valley, directing Ku Lama Pio 'Ole. Ku Lama Pio 'Ole is a grant to improve the quality of math and science instruction in our school and throughout the immersion system by developing curriculum rooted in traditional Hawaiian agricultural practices. As I look back on the paths that have led me to this job, I know I am in the right place. I have been blessed to receive the quality, Western education which I did. However, I had much to learn about our Hawaiian traditions and the land which is my home. The students at our school will not have to know only one or the other. With the help of this grant, it is my job to ensure that they can have both, that knowing how to plant kalo stimulates their understanding of chemistry, biology, physics, and geology; that a strong foundation in their own culture drives them to want to learn about others; and that our teachers have the skills to build bridges to connect them.

In closing, I hope that this humble story of one person will convince you that every dollar you spend towards improving education for one young Hawaiian enables us to work to improve conditions for a hundred others. I know you will hear many discouraging statistics about how much our people need this assistance. I want you also to know that the alternative models of education which we Hawaiians are creating through this act are innovative, progressive, and inspiring, and that they offer lessons and opportunities for better education throughout Hawai'i nei and, indeed, the United States of America. There is much work left to be done to solidify, test, document, and extend these programs. Mahalo a nui loa, I offer my deepest gratitude to you all, for giving me the opportunity to go away and to come home, to learn from and join in this vital work of improving Hawaiian education.